

AMENDMENTS

In the claims:

Applicant amends independent claims 1, 14, and 21 to more particularly define a claim limitation. As such, the amendments are not related to patentability and do not narrow the claims as originally presented. Claims 1-47 are therefore pending.

To satisfy the requirements of 37 CFR 1.125(a) and 37 CFR 1.52(a), all pending claims, whether amended or not, are presented below. A marked-up version of these claims showing the amended and new claims follows the Remarks section of this Response.

Pending Claims 1-47:

I claim:

1. (Once amended) A method for facilitating and tracking personal referrals, comprising:
generating a unique identifier that is associated exclusively with the pairing of one individual and one offer;
sending to said individual an electronic-mail message that provides a hyperlink to or contains a Web page whose address or contents includes said unique identifier or a transformation thereof, and
providing in said Web page a means to allow the individual to input the electronic-mail address of persons whom said individual wishes to refer.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein said unique identifier or a transformation thereof is included in a uniform resource locator.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
determining whether said individual has previously been sent an electronic-mail message about said offer.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
determining whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving all such electronic-mail messages.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
determining whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to a category of items that contains said offer.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
determining the party whose referral caused said offer to be made to said individual and whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to offers referred by said party.
7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
providing in said Web page a means of accepting said offer.
8. The method of claim 7, further comprising:
notifying the sponsor of said offer in case of an acceptance by said individual.
9. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
providing in said Web page a means of opting out of receiving all such electronic-mail messages.
10. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
providing in said Web page a means of opting out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to one or more categories of such offers.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
providing in said Web page a means of opting out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to offers referred by the party whose referral caused said offer to be made to said individual.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
determining whether said offer is still valid and substituting the latest version of said offer.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
sending electronic-mail messages to said persons who were referred by said individual

14. (Once amended) An apparatus for facilitating and tracking personal referrals, comprising: a storage device; and
a processor connected to said storage device,
said storage device storing a program for controlling said processor; and said processor operative with said program to:
generate a unique identifier that is associated exclusively with the pairing of one individual and one offer;
send to said individual an electronic-mail message that provides a hyperlink to or contains a Web page whose address or contents includes said unique identifier or a transformation thereof; and
provide in said Web page a means to allow the individual to input the electronic-mail address of persons whom said individual wishes to refer.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to determine whether said individual has previously been sent an electronic-mail message about said offer.

16. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to determine whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving all such electronic-mail messages.

17. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to determine whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to a category of items that contains said offer.

18. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to determine the party whose referral caused said offer to be made to said individual and whether said individual has previously opted out of receiving electronic-mail messages pertaining to offers referred by said party.

19. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to notify the sponsor of said offer in case of an acceptance by said individual.

20. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said processor is further operative to send electronic-mail messages to said persons who were referred by said individual in the case when said offer is still valid.
21. (Once amended) A method for distributing an offer, the method comprising, providing at least one database including at least one participant electronic mail address, generating an electronic mail to the at least one participant that includes at least one of a Web page and a hyperlink to a Web page, the Web page further including data based on the offer, and, providing in the Web page an option for allowing the at least one participant to opt out.
22. A method according to claim 21, further including, receiving at least one selection based on the at least one participant's at least one option, and, updating the at least one database based on the received at least one selection.
23. A method according to claim 22, further including providing a central controller in communication with the database, the central controller further including instructions for receiving the at least one selection.
24. A method according to claim 22, further including communicating the at least one selection over a network.
25. A method according to claim 21, wherein providing an offer includes providing at least one of a job offer and employment data.
26. A method according to claim 22, wherein receiving at least one selection further includes receiving a selection to opt out, and updating the at least one database includes updating at least one of data associated with the at least one participant and data associated with the offer.
27. A method according to claim 22, wherein, receiving at least one selection further includes receiving a selection to accept, and, updating the at least one database includes, determining whether the offer is valid, and, updating at least one of data associated with the at least one participant and data associated with the offer.
28. A method according to claim 27, wherein updating the at least one database further includes generating an electronic mail message to an originator of the offer.
29. A method according to claim 22, wherein

receiving at least one selection further includes receiving a selection of referral,
and,
updating the at least one database includes updating at least one of data associated
with the at least one participant and data associated with the offer.

30. A method according to claim 29, wherein receiving a selection of referral includes
receiving at least one email address based on at least one referral participant.

31. A method according to claim 29, wherein updating the at least one database includes
entering into the database as a participant, at least one email address based on at least one
referral participant.

32. A method according to claim 29, further including
receiving at least one email address based on the at least one referral participant,
and,
determining at least one of whether
the at least referral participant opted out of the offer,
the at least one offer is valid,
the at least one offer is updated, and,
the at least one referral participant previously received the offer.

33. A method according to claim 32, wherein determining whether the at least one offer
is updated includes substituting the updated offer.

34. A method according to claim 21, further including updating the at least one database
to reflect that the at least one participant received an electronic mail message based on
the offer.

35. A method according to claim 21, further including associating with the at least one
participant, an identity of at least one referring participant who referred the at least one
participant.

36. A method according to claim 21, further including determining whether the at least
one participant opted-out of the offer.

37. A method according to claim 21, further including determining whether the offer is
valid.

38. A method according to claim 22, wherein receiving the at least one selection further
includes receiving an option to opt out and at least one further selection to prohibit any
further offers, any further offers in a particular category, and any further offers based on
at least one participant referral.

39. A method according to claim 21, further including providing an offer database
having at least one offer.

40. A method according to claim 21, further including associating an identifier with the offer and one of the at least one participant.
41. A method for tracking an offer, the method comprising,
 providing a Web page based on the offer, the Web page including at least one option to opt out, accept, and refer,
 utilizing a database to determine at least one participant,
 sending an electronic mail message to the at least one participant, the electronic mail message including at least one of the Web page and a hyperlink to the Web page,
 receiving from the at least one participant, at least one option based on a selection to opt out, accept, and refer, and,
 updating the database based on the at least one selection.
42. A method according to claim 41, wherein the offer includes a job description.
43. A method according to claim 41, further including providing an offer database.
44. A method according to claim 41, further including receiving at least one electronic email address based on at least one referral participant.
45. A method according to claim 41, further including identifying a referring participant associated with a selection to accept.
46. A method according to claim 41, further including identifying a participant who opted out based on the offer.
47. A method according to claim 41, further including associating an identifier with the offer and one of the at least one participant.

REMARKS

This Response is filed in reply to the final Office Action dated September 5, 2001.

Applicant directs the Examiner to Bezos. A merchant includes a web site 106 that allows customers to purchase products, including products of the merchant selected from web sites of associates using referral links on the associate's web site (Col. 6, lines 11-14). Accordingly, associates enroll with the merchant and set up *their own* associate web site that includes the "special hyperlinks (to Web pages of the merchant web site 106)... (Col. 7, lines 6-10) "[T]he special hyperlinks (also referred to herein as "referral links" of the associate's catalog documents are provided in association with additional information ... that is transmitted to the merchant Web site 106 in response to the selection of the link. In one implementation, this information includes a unique identifier